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Reagan Fires U.S. Attorney in San Diego for CIA 'Leak'

By RON OSTROW, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—President Reagan Monday fired U.S. Atty. William H. Kennedy of San Diego for his role in publicly identifying a former high Mexican government official as a key source for the CIA on Mexico and Central America.

Atty. Gen. William French Smith said the action was taken because Kennedy had made improper comments about a pending criminal case that involved the former official, Miguel Nassar Haro.

"The comments were highly prejudicial to the interests of the United States," Smith said.

The announcement of Kennedy's dismissal was made by the Justice Department, presumably to separate Reagan as much as possible from the potentially embarrassing action.

The announcement said that Kennedy, who had drawn strong support from federal judges and the law enforcement community in San Diego since he became embroiled in the controversy, had been advised by E. Pendleton James, director of White House personnel, that he had been dismissed.

The controversy stemmed from Kennedy's confirmation for the San

Diego Union last month that the CIA and Justice Department were holding up the indictment of Nassar Haro in connection with an international car-theft ring that Kennedy's office was investigating.

Kennedy confirmed that Nassar Haro, who until January headed Mexico's Directorate of Federal Security, was regarded by the CIA as a top source.

Smith said Kennedy had been given "every opportunity to fully explain his conduct" in meetings here last week with Deputy Atty. Gen. Edward Schmults and Associate Atty. Gen. Rudolph W. Giuliani. The attorney general said Kennedy had refused an opportunity to resign, and that Schmults, Giuliani and two other unnamed department officials all recommended that he be fired.

The announcement said Smith studied the matter carefully and recommended to Reagan Monday that Kennedy be dismissed.

"It's the type of action the attorney general will take when a department official makes prejudicial comments," said Arthur P. Brill, the

Justice Department's deputy director of public affairs.

In San Diego, Kennedy issued a statement confirming his dismissal and saying he would "comply with the President's order."

"As a matter of principle," the statement said, "I made the decision not to resign. Many people I respect support me in that decision."

As to the statement attributed to him in the San Diego Union, Kennedy said it was accurate and that he had "nothing more to add or apologize for."